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MARX`THEORY OF VALUE (2)

ECONOFICTION   MARX, MARXISM, VALUE, VALUE–FORM

1. simple and unfolded value form

On the one hand, we take a look at the so-called capital-logical reading (which has been widely discussed since the 1968 student movement, especially in Germany, based on Hans-Georg Backhaus as an analysis of value forms, cf. Backhaus 1997/ Elbe 2008) and on the other hand, following the semio-economic reading of the problem by Harald Strauß, that the representation of value forms from the simple to the unfolded to the general value form contains a formal explication of the conceptual figures of "self-similarity and reflexive form" (Strauß 2013: 159ff) (of goods) and thus does not refer to the representation of certain historical development phases before or in capitalism (simple production of goods). We are therefore dealing with the problem of the representation of the "contemporaneous history" of capital, in and with which capital sets itself, a history for which Marx, with regard to the aspect of the "contemporaneous" itself, has delivered a concise definition: "These preconditions, which originally appeared as conditions of his becoming – and therefore could not yet arise from his action as capital – now appear as results of his own realization, reality, as set by him – not as a result of his emergence, but as results of his existence". (Marx 1974: 364) The expropriation of the direct producers of their means of work is presupposed to capital and thus it is for its part a set form, but also remains the permanently set form of this expropriation. In a sense, the process of separating the producers from the means of production continues throughout the internal history of capitalism. If one now follows Althusser's position, the auto-logic of capital, as Marx attempts to categorically grasp it in capital, is preceded by the necessity of an initially singular encounter of deterritorialized labor flows and capital flows, which emerged from the side of labor flows in and with the processes of original accumulation and was described by Marx in the concluding chapter of Capital Vol. 1 primarily as the separation of producers from their means of production, a process that Marx describes as the prehistory of capital. This is to be understood as a singular, non-linear history, within which the relationship between worker and capital was only most likely necessary, for ultimately the incorporation of actors into the wage labor relationship did not necessarily result from the transformation of serfs into doubly free labor, but when this happened historically, Marx could speak of the means of production as a suspension into the necessity of capitalist accumulation, in terms of the mass expropriation of producers, as her secret premise in so far as capitalist reproduction perpetuates the doubly free worker by subsuming him to a process of form based on the appropriation of added value. Thus capitalist accumulation implies the perpetual reproduction of the fundamental process of separation. This is the dynamic of an immanent static (Adorno), a becoming of social relations in and with which all fixations tend to be dissolved and the "law" of capitalist development nevertheless remains unchanged. Only from the perspective of the fully developed, self-setting capital can the meaning of the original accumulation, which itself is not inherent in any teleology, be explained. At the same time, with regard to the development of deterritorialized capitalist money flows, both the emergence of urban trade capital in Northern Italy and the absolutist state and its industrial-military complex have to be taken into account, for only through a prospering economy was it possible to finance the wars in the 16th century in Europe, which ultimately led to mercantilism and the establishment of manufactories.

Let us now finally talk about the different forms of values. Marx wants to read the equation x Ware A = y Ware B as an expression of value "x Ware A is y Ware B worth", as an expression that indicates that goods a) are certain quantities of different commodities (the parameters x and y mean quantities, while A and B symbolize specific types of goods), b) are equated in a very specific way, insofar as the identity set by the sign "=" conceals a difference. At the same time one could also say that in the expression of value, analogous to the meaning of the philosophical term "expression", the expression envelops the expressed as long as it does not exist outside the expression. It should be noted, however, that Marx always analyses economic expressions in terms of their possibility, thereby indicating that

they shift in the course of the representation of the self-similarity of the forms of value until they are finally exposed to the break (in the "transition" between the general form of value and money), to finally leave the expressions entirely to decay, which as a process of critique ever points beyond the representation of the various concepts. In the expression itself, therefore, the break that characterizes it is itself traced.

First of all, the problem at this point is that the expression of value, if it is written down as an equation, requires a kind of dimensional equality, without which we immediately have to deal with a logical contradiction, because 20 cubits of canvas are as little like 1 skirt as 5 apples are equal to 3 pears. The linguistic formulation explicating the equation "20 Ellen canvas are worth 1 skirt" can also be formulated as follows: "The value of 20 Ellen canvas = the value of 1 skirt", a formula which, however, again expresses nothing but a tautology, because what Marx wants to explain, namely the value, he presupposes with the fixation of the equation. (Cf. Ruben 1998: 21f.) To put it another way, the analysis of the simple value form would have to show that the goods realize something like an ideal identity in a quantitative way. The ininsertion of equation and value expression really seems to be a problem here, as long as the differential (symbolic) determination of value expression is not brought into play. And finally one would have to show that this equation can only be read against the background of a third party, because purely from the factors of representationalism and relation the "value of the commodity" cannot be extracted conceptually. Hans-Joachim Lenger has pointed out that the proposition of identity A=A already points to a third, to a difference that precedes the equation, insofar as A has already doubled in A=A and is therefore at the same time a third as the first A, so that identity emerges from the repetition of difference. A is not simply identical with itself, but will have been identical with itself via a detour, with which A as origin or as first has ever been deleted. (Cf. Lenger 2004: 68f.) Here again we are dealing with an "there is" that is to be understood as a difference to positivity, but which takes place in positivity itself. And this difference touches the non-representational and thus the value.

Within the "equation", the goods A and B (in a relationship pure as such, i.e., independent of the exchange of the goods) face each other in a polar relationship, i.e., they occupy different positions: While the commodity A is in relative value form (active), the commodity B occupies the position of the equivalent form (passive), whereby it is impossible that a commodity in one of the two positions is updated simultaneously, although the positions can be virtually exchanged. With the possibility of changing place, commodity A possesses a weak passivity, because it must already have been assigned that it is active, while commodity B cannot be separated from a weak activity as a form of immediate interchangeability, so that, as Lenger has shown, différance is already integrated into the game here, by conferring on the expression of value the moments of activity/passivity, as well as withdrawing them, so that the object of Marx's theory at this point simply proves to be an impossible one. (ibid.) Virtualization on this level thus implies that position changes take place (position changes are virtual and positions are given at the same time); however, no commodity can be actualized simultaneously in both forms (value form and equivalent form). (Cf. Strauß 2013: 159f.) The statement "20 Ellen canvases are worth 1 rock" can therefore be supplemented by the statement "1 rock is worth 20 Ellen canvases", with which back-reference or equivalence is set. With the terms relative value form and equivalence form, Marx brought into play from the outset concepts of relationship that are at first polar and at the same time mutually determined, insofar as one term does not "function" without the other term. And it should be pointed out that both goods A and B, with their positioning as "relative value form" and "equivalent form", are in an asymmetrical relation, which also means that the equation at the moment of equation is characterized by a non-simultaneity of places (currently the goods can only be at one place), so that even in the case of the simple value form one must assume that the expression or fiction of a conclusion is underdetermined.

What does value expression mean at this point? Product A actively makes product B its expression of value and at the same time expresses its value to itself via product B, thus distinguishing it from

of itself as a commodity. Marx writes: "By equating the other pairs as Werth, she refers to herself as Werth. By referring to itself as Werth, it simultaneously distinguishes itself from itself as utility value". (MEGA II/5: 30) This equation of product A with product B (by means of the production of self-similarity) suggests that product A would reflect its value in product B (whereby the natural form of product B would be put into a reflexive form), whereby Marx actually refers with the formulation "expression of product A in the body of product B" to the fact that product A explicates something in the expression of value or expresses its value, so that product B with its secondary utility value is regarded as something, namely as "mirror" of the value of product A. (MEGA II/6: 89) But this mirroring includes an "as if", because product A does not, of course, appear with its value in front of a mirror, but this kind of mirroring is solely the result of a formal determination that results from the juxtaposition of the two products. (Cf. Strauß 2013: 160) As product A is related to product B as an equivalent, product B is regarded as an expression of the value of product A, whereby the validity in the semiotic dimension is to be understood as a symbol. Product B thus becomes the interpreter of the value of product A but not of object A. Depending on which position goods occupy within the expression of value, Marx attributes to them either an active or a passive mode; he wants to show that product A, which is in the relative form of value, brings about something in the second product B that could never take place outside this relation, whereby product B in the reflexive form is initially the passive element, but in this, as an object of use, which is regarded as an expression of the value of product A, acquires the form of direct interchangeability (and thus an activity status). "The expression of the canvas value in the skirt gives the skirt itself a new form. Indeed, what does the value form of the canvas say? That the skirt is interchangeable with it. As it walks or lies, with skin and hair, in its natural form of skirt, it now possesses the form of direct interchangeability with other goods, the form of an exchangeable utility value or equivalent. (MEGA II/5: 29) (By the potential reversal of its position, product B can also express its own value by detouring product A.)

Hans-Joachim Lenger writes the following about this Marxian concept: "Rather, both places mark a difference that initially reveals itself as one of 'activity' and 'passivity'". (Lenger 2007) The fact that commodity A as an active moment passes through its other (commodity B as a passive moment) in order to return to itself is indicated in the sign of equality as well as hidden. At this point, according to Marx, Lenger adds Derrida's famous figure of différance to Marx's expression of value. (Lenger 2004: 75) Because

product B is not actually expressed in the equation in the first place, but only helps product A to express its value, a kind of "inexpressible delay" is present in the expression itself at this point and with it a difference that remains withdrawn as well as indicated, and thus this kind of equation is always already torn by the delay. Lenger stresses here the aspect of the (real) impossibility of the formula or the concept of the "value form". He refers to Derrida, who writes here: "Each concept is inscribed according to its law in a chain or in a system, in which it refers to the other, to the other concepts, through the systematic play of differences. Such a game, the différance, is not simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual process and system in general". (Derrida 1976: 16) In Derrida, what he calls différance appears neither active nor passive, but rather the différance announces a medial form, the play of difference (medium) and unity, and precisely in this respect, according to Lenger, in Marx's conceptual games about the expression of value, postponement remains actually present as well as withdrawn, which corresponds, so to speak, to a differentiating difference that Marx shifts ever further through the money medium without ever being able to control it. This mastery does not succeed either through the operation of reversing the expression of value, through its "reading backwards and forwards", with which Marx creates equivalence – but rather, according to Lenger, only with the concept of capital does the structure emerge with all its aspects of spatialization and temporalization itself, so that one must always remember that "no term that differs from others can function as a genealogical principle of a structure from which it itself emerges. "1

Peter Ruben makes an interesting attempt at formalizing the simple value form when he dissolves the tautology underlying the value equation – which arises immediately if one reads the simple value form purely as an equation and does not describe it as a differential expression – by using the linguistic statement value form "a/ = b", which indicates the concrete equality – exact comparability – of goods. Ruben writes concerning the expression of value: "In it the subject 'a' designates the object of value determination, the object 'b' the means of value determination and the predicate '= b' the property of the object to be evaluated a.". (Ruben 2008:93) And Ruben comes to the conclusion that this statement is compatible with Marx's definition of value expression or with the polar opposites of value form and equivalent form. Here the grammatical structure "commodity A is commodity B equivalent" must be observed, in which A and B are distinguished as subject and object, whereby commodity A (active) is in "relative value form" and commodity B (passive) is in "equivalent form". A is described as subject/object and B as object, whereby object B serves as a means of expressing the value of object A, which additionally requires a predicate (property) by which an equivalence ratio is given or fixed. In Rubens' statement, the commodity B stands as a reflexive form for the unity of equality property (predicate/logical center) and means of comparison, which is an object or an object of utility. And thus the unity of property and object (which of course presupposes an analytical separation), which expresses equivalence, could be written down syntactically and logically flawlessly. Paradoxically, it is precisely product B which, as a reflexive form and thus as the actually passive element of the product relation, at the same time gives the active moment of differentiation in the course of the self-similarity of product A and B by first putting product A into the form of accepting one's own activity quasi like a reception. The reflexive form, which consists of product B embodying the value of product A at the same time as a body of its own value, contains here the figure of a bend back. And finally, it should be noted that the (logical) problem of the genesis of value forms does not consist precisely in how forms of value come about at all, but in which transitions are necessary in order to move from the simple to the general form of value. Then, in the context of the problem of representation, one could now decide in favour of a "logic" of representation by means of conceptual unfolding from the simple to the unfolded to the general form of value, whereby money in its first function as a general measure of values would quasi be "caught up". (Cf. Engster 2010) Or, as we do at any rate, for the necessity of constructing conceptual problems, in which constellations, systematics, and argumentations are deconstructed or even destroyed at the respective conceptual structural level. And at the same time it could be shown that specific problematics do not necessarily have to merge into appropriate conceptual relations, but require a further generation, montage and systematization of concepts, so that new objects of knowledge (Althusser) emerge first, without, however, arriving at a final systematics. In the case of the simple form of value, the conceptual postponement as a break and as a necessary transition is already suggested by the mere coincidence of the expression of value, because of course any arbitrary commodity can take the place of the relative form of value or the equivalent form, whereby, moreover, the common that is supposed to be characteristic of the goods, namely to be a product of labor, is only indicated as a cipher. (Cf. Lenger 2004: 112ff.)

The so-called unfolded form of value is a multi-digit relation or an extended elementary proposition which contains the statement that the value of commodity A can express itself in potentially infinitely many other commodities: x commodity A= y commodity B = v commodity C etc.., which makes it immediately apparent that a) in the context of this series, it is irrelevant in which goods product A expresses its value, whether in skirt, canvas, wheat, computer chips or any other object, b) each newly offered type of goods increases the quantity of goods that can take the place of the equivalent form, so that the equivalent form is potentially open. Goods A are in the position of the relative value form, while all other goods are virtually in the position of special equivalents. Marx writes in this regard: "Meanwhile, the individual value form automatically changes into a more complete form. The value of a commodity A is only expressed in a commodity of another kind.

But what kind of this second commodity […] is absolutely indifferent […] The number of its possible expressions of value is only limited by the number of different types of commodity." (MEW 23: 76) It becomes obvious immediately that even with this configuration of goods it is not possible to write stable and fixed relations within a goods-money-capital-system.

Ruben uses the sentence link "a /= b ∨ a/ = c ∨ a/ = d ∨ …" to represent the unfolded value form. It is an open chain of (self-similar) signifiers, mathematically expressed as a non-exclusive disjunction or a potentially infinite adjunction, within which it is possible

to replace commodity B in its function as predicate/comparative means by a potentially infinite number of commodities. (Ruben 2008: 94) This kind of syntax of the concatenation of goods, which contains various reflexive forms in itself, leads, as can easily be seen, into an infinite progress, or to put it another way, product A is now (virtually) confronted with all types of goods, as Marx states in the first edition of capital. The infinite value expression of any commodity A is shown by the fact that any other commodity can represent it, but does not come to an end through the representation in all the other commodities. Already at this point it seems possible to imagine a patchwork of falling apart value expressions, whereby each commodity, insofar as it is in the relative value form, potentially expresses its value in endlessly many other commodities, while with the realization of a value expression each individual equivalent form excludes other equivalent forms. Goods A are thus potentially confronted with all types of goods, with which virtualization is present, but which cannot at the same time be expressed as realization. (Strauß 2013: 162) The number of all possible forms of value is ultimately equal to n (n = 1; 2; : : : ;N).2 With Marx's definition of the unfolded form of value, now the commodity A, which is located in the relative form of value, would be confronted with n-1 other commodities, which are all potentially capable of assuming the position of the form of equivalence, whereby these commodities cannot be combined arbitrarily with each other, however, but exclude each other as equivalents in each realization. On the basis of the frequency implication assumed in the unfolded value form alone, such an economic system (and only capitalism is an economic system) cannot be attributed any stability and consistency, but also because the problem of mutual exclusions exists here. In the disjunctive series, which allows x possible substitutes for commodity B, the difference is unfolded and postponed at the same time, insofar as it is supposed to express the value, without ever being able to eliminate the difference as the value unfolds. To put it another way, insofar as each commodity can be the general equivalent for the relation of all other commodities to each other, and so that each commodity can put all other commodities into relation to each other, the commodities are decisive only for themselves, but cannot form an economic system as such, because measure and mathematics of the economic system always fall into any arbitrary commodity, and this inevitably leads to an infinite recourse.

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(Lenger 2007) In: Texts, http://www.hjlenger.de/. At this point, it should be emphasized once
again that the figure of the simple form of value must not under any circumstances be understood
as an original image or even as the first reflection of any concrete exchange relationship of a
very specific historical period, as parts of Marx Orthodoxy, with its ontologizing and
transhistorical readings of capital Vol. 1, practice to this day by inventing real-historical
phases such as the simple production of goods and simple circulation. Without the real existence
of money as well as money in the form of the movement of capital (in the context of individual
and total capital), capitalist commodity production is simply not possible, with the result that
the conditions of economic stability in capitalism are already proving to be those of a
(logical-medial) formation/structure.
At this point, it seems appropriate to briefly refer to the difference between the concept of an
(open) whole and the concept of totality, since the latter plays a not insignificant role in the
history of reception across all marxisms, with which the latter undoubtedly join the line of
traditional philosophy from Plato to Hegel, which finally assumed that the whole forms an entity
that is then also regarded as totality. It was probably Lucretius who was the first philosopher
to take a different position, assuming that all those who asserted that the whole is a totality,
also must assume that absolutely nothing can escape this whole, with which, as Hegel admitted by
the way, every phenomenon is or must become an actual one. For Lucretius, instead, there is a
finite number of types of atoms, while there is an infinite number of atoms with infinite
combination possibilities, so that never all possible combinations are exhausted in reality.
Apparently here it is the difference that dominates over identity, no matter whether one defines
it as form, essence or concept, with which the whole never forms something like a totality,
because on the one hand it contains virtuality that is not in time, on the other hand it itself
is only a local manifestation of atoms, which updates some of the possible combinations, i.e.
lets them become temporal, and others just not, which of course also indicates that the whole
should be understood as open in principle. Deleuze then replaced the term totality in his
structural concept with totality or the (open) whole, according to which structure contains only
a virtual totality that is never actualized as a totality, because this would presuppose that a
virtuality that is still undifferentiated would have completely differentiated itself.
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